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THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF SACRED LITERATURE

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION A PROFESSIONAL READING COURSE

Conducted by
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STUDY II EXPERIENCES OF INDIVIDUALS

Required Books

James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*.
Davenport, *Primitive Trails in Religious Revivals*.
Burr, *Religious Confessions and Confessants*.

The experiences of individuals in conversion were the first phenomena with which the psychology of religion dealt, and certain results obtained in those investigations remain unchallenged. Starbuck, Coe, Hall, and others agreed, for example, that conversion is definitely an adolescent phenomenon and that the largest number of conversions occur at sixteen years of age for males and a year or so earlier for females. Scarcely any such awakenings transpire before the age of ten and relatively very few after the age of twenty-five. If an individual does not become interested in religious work and identified with religious institutions before he is eighteen the chances of his ever doing so diminish rapidly after that time. It is also found that the conversions come in a somewhat different way to the two sexes. Girls are more emotional and are more susceptible to the influences of revivals and public appeals. Boys, on the contrary, are likely to resist these direct crowd suggestions and are more likely to reach their decisions alone or with intimate friends. There are also marked differences of temperament. Coe was able to prove in a number of cases that persons of naturally mercurial temperament responded to religious appeals in a characteristic manner, and that a slower and more intense conflict appeared in those of phlegmatic disposition. He found that these responses were true to type when the persons were placed under hypnosis.

The general effect of revivals was found to be a shortening and intensifying of the normal adolescent awakening. Further studies in social psychology have confirmed the earlier impressions that the rise of religion is vitally related to the development of the sexual life. These studies were made very largely by the aid of the questionnaire method, and served to bring out both the advantages and the weaknesses of that method.

Professor James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* is written in the author's well-known, fascinating style. The materials, instead of being gathered in response to questions, are derived from literary sources and are largely autobiographical. The work is an interesting illustration of the writer's zest for dealing with first-hand human experience and of his thirst for facts. It has been suggested that this book reveals a tendency to treat of rather unusual cases, displaying too much preference for the intensely emotional experiences. But the contrast of well-defined types is certainly secured, and the volume is altogether one of the most illuminating in the literature of the subject. James regards religion as an "infinitely passionate" thing in its highest flights. "Like love, like wrath, like hope, ambition, jealousy, like every other instinctive eagerness and impulse, it adds to life an enchantment which is not rationally or logically deducible from anything else." He thinks the ordinary religious believer follows the conventional observances of his country made for him by others, while "we must make search rather for the original experiences which were the pattern-setters to all this mass of suggested feeling and imitated conduct."

Among the preliminary considerations which James takes into account is that of the relation in which religion stands to physical and neurological conditions. The truth and value of religious experiences cannot be denied or proved on the basis of their author's neurotic constitution any more than this can be done with the sciences and the industrial arts. Logic and experiment should furnish the tests in all cases. "*Immediate luminousness*, in short, *philosophical reasonableness* and *moral helpfulness* are the only available criteria."

Religion is conceived as having two distinct phases, the institutional and the more personal and inner aspect. It is the latter which is here treated—"personal religion pure and simple."

The two main varieties of this personal religious experience of which James treats are those of healthy-mindedness and of the sin-sick soul. The religion of healthy-mindedness is illustrated by those happy, buoyant persons possessing souls of the "sky-blue tint," untroubled by a depressing sense of sin. Emerson, Theodore Parker, and Edward Everett Hale are of this type. Many individuals of the unitarian and liberal Protestant faith have displayed this quality. They have been called the "once-born" souls. They are optimists with a temperament "organically weighted on the side of cheer." Walt Whitman is a supreme example.

This religion of healthy-mindedness includes two classes, the voluntary and the involuntary optimists. With some people it is constitutional and an overflow of natural good spirits. With others it is a chosen and a deliberately maintained attitude. When once adopted this cheerful way of life quickly gathers to itself many justifications and produces aversions to the unhappy moods. They are painful, mean, and ugly. "What can be more base and unworthy than the pining, puling, mumping mood, no matter by what outward ills it may have been engendered? What is more injurious to others?" Liberalism has embodied this protest in its aversion to the doctrines of human depravity and of hell-fire. The idea of evolution has produced another group which sees in the doctrine of general meliorism and progress a new basis for religious optimism. The mind-cure movement is a third instance of this attitude and a more important one. It is also called "New Thought." The doctrinal sources which have contributed to mind-

cure are the four Gospels, New England transcendentalism, Berkeleyan idealism, spiritism, popular-science evolutionism, and Hinduism. But the most characteristic feature is the deliberate adoption of a healthy-minded attitude. It has been attained by individuals who supposed themselves incapable of it, and has produced regeneration and restoration to a remarkable degree. The spread of the movement is attributed to its practical results and to the practical temper of the American people, whose only original contribution to religion, according to James, is to be seen in these therapeutic cults. These cults do not emphasize so much the philosophy of evil as practical methods of dealing with it. They do not worry over it as a "mystery" or as a "problem," but forbid one to think of or recognize it as a reality. Their methods are those of suggestion.

The sick souls take evil much more seriously and refuse to believe that it can be dealt with by mere assertion of its being illusory. The despair of life arises from different causes with different people. With some, as with Tolstoy, it is a sense of disillusionment regarding life itself. With others, Bunyan for example, the troubles arise from one's temperament and misfortune. "He was a typical case of the psychopathic temperament, sensitive of conscience to a diseased degree, beset by doubts, fears, and insistent ideas, and a victim of verbal automatisms, both motor and sensory." To such persons our refined optimisms and moral consolations do not seem adequate, and therefore James wonders whether the "coarser religions, revivalistic, orgiastic, with blood and miracles and supernatural operations, may possibly never be displaced."

This diremption of the world for the melancholy spirits is expressed in a divided self, the conflict between the natural man and the spiritual. It is impossible for these to regard the overcoming of the bitterness and poignancy of sin as a process of growth or of simple adjustment of any kind. The struggles of remorse and helplessness produce the sense of a divided self. To overcome this division a second birth is needed. "There are two lives, the natural and the spiritual, and we must lose the one before we can participate in the other." The experiences of these deep alienations and discords are cited in numerous quotations full of passionate longing and aspiration. Saint Augustine is a striking example with his half-pagan, half-Christian inheritance, and his restless search for peace and purity. His higher wishes lack just that "last acuteness, that touch of explosive intensity, of dynamogenic quality that enables them to burst their shell, and make irruption efficaciously into life." Sometimes the actual sins are not at all commensurate with the violence of the emotional upheaval. It is pointed out that the resolution of the conflict is not always in the direction of religious unification. Occasionally it is on the side of incredulity and not infrequently toward license. Again, it may take a new channel, such as love or ambition or patriotic devotion. In any of these ways a certain firmness and equilibrium may succeed the period of storm and stress. Accounts are given of such "counter-conversions" from orthodoxy to infidelity and of sudden change to avarice.

Conversion is the achievement of unity in the direction of religious ideals after the strain and perplexity of doubt and depression. It may come gradually or at a stroke, the varieties of experience appearing in these cases with as marked contrast as between the once-born types and the twice-born types themselves. The psychology of association of ideas provides explanation for the differences.

We are constantly undergoing changes of the self when we pass from the set of ideas which belong to one set of interests, such as professional work, to those which are characteristic of recreation. The transition is more radical when a man changes one vocation for another, as when a printer becomes a traveling salesman. And the transformation is of a still deeper kind when one surrenders the habits of a care-free pleasure-seeker for a settled, strenuous pursuit of learning or social service. The center of emotional excitement changes. The hot-spot of the mind shifts. In the wavering and divided self this shift alternates back and forth between the contrasted poles of interest. In conversion it goes over to the religious ideas and lies there in that system permanently. "The habitual center of personal energy" is established in the system of religious ideas and activities. Just how this occurs psychology cannot fully explain either in religion or in any of the more commonplace events of daily life. The influences which bring the change may be subconscious and they may work by slow mutations or by sudden culminations of energy. Some individuals are by temperament and training impervious to such influences and cannot attain a pronounced conversion experience. In the presence of the religious appeals some persons find themselves "frozen," others are "anaesthetic," "deficient in the category of sensibility." Types of conversion are also likened to the different ways of recalling forgotten names. At times the result can be secured by working for it. Again, no effort seems of any avail, and one succeeds better by just giving up the attempt and allowing the name to pop into the mind of its own accord. Conversions are of these two kinds. They may be attained by the direct quest, but they may come independently of it.

The phenomena of the subconscious, the discovery of which James characterizes as the most important step forward that occurred in psychology during his time, are employed in this analysis. This "ultra-marginal" field is the source of incursions into the ordinary field of consciousness in ways that appear most marvelous to the subject of them. This helps to explain cases of sudden conversion. No objection should be made to such explanation since the test of the value of conversion cannot consist in the manner of it, but only in its "fruits for life." This is not to deny that the experience is momentous for the subject of it. "A small man's salvation will always be a great salvation and the greatest of all facts *for him*." Backslidings and relapses are psychological facts common to religious converts and to all other sorts of converts. "Men lapse from every level"—from love as well as from religious enthusiasm.

"Saintliness" is the title chosen for the discussion of the fruits of religion. The marks of saintliness are the feeling of being in a wider life than that of this world's selfish little interests and a conviction of the existence of an Ideal Power; a sense of immediate relation with it and of surrender to it; elation and freedom; a shifting of the emotional center toward loving affections. The practical consequences are: asceticism, strength of soul, purity, and charity, each of which James illustrates by abundant quotations from the lives of the saints. The value of each of these qualities is assessed. In a closing chapter brief consideration is given to sacrifice, confession, prayer, and inspiration. Interesting comparisons are made between the Protestant and the Catholic religions, as to their wealth of motive, aesthetic qualities, and adaptation to the many sides of human nature.

Primitive Traits in Religious Revivals, by Davenport, represents a new development in the field of the psychology of religion. It deals with the same general phenomena as the earlier works, the phenomena of conversion, but employs a social point of view and a corresponding method. The book presents an interesting and informing illustration of the new light which social psychology may throw upon religious problems after the best representatives of individualistic psychology have made their investigations.

Religious revivals are studied together with related social movements, such as lynching mobs and political revolutions. Three social laws are stated which are at work in all three. The first is that social action originates among people who have least inhibitory control. The plan of action may not have had this origin, but the execution of it is likely to be due to the response of impulsive individuals. John Brown's raid, the storming of the Bastille, and the Crusades are cited as examples. The second is the law of spread. "Impulsive social action tends, through imitation, to extend and intensify in geometrical progression." The spread of early Christianity illustrates this law. Household conversions were common. The rise of a revival in the United States, in 1857, started by one man, Jeremiah C. Lanphier, in New York, extended to the entire country. Certain physical and mental conditions are thought to predispose to this emotionalism, such as sudden changes of climate from summer to winter and monotonous topography. Instinctive fear tends to induce sympathetic movements. The revivals of New England early in the eighteenth century, and those in Kentucky a century later, had a fear environment, "fear of starvation, of wild beasts, and savages." Difficulty of communication and general illiteracy predispose to emotionalism, which is further stimulated by the massing of people in great companies, as in the camp meetings of those days.

Illustrations of the crowd movements are found in the Indian ghost-dance, the religion of the American negro, the Scotch-Irish revival in Kentucky in 1800. Of the Cane Ridge camp meeting, Davenport says that nothing was lacking to stir to its profoundest depths the imagination and emotion of this great throng of men, women, and children. "It was at night that the most terrible scenes were witnessed, when the camp fires blazed in a mighty circle around the vast audience of pioneers bowed in devotion. Beyond was the blackness of the primeval forest, above the night wind and the foliage and the stars. As the darkness deepened, the exhortations of the preachers became more fervent and impassioned, their picturesque prophecies of doom more lurid and alarming, the volume of song burst all bonds of guidance and control, and broke again and again from the throats of the people, while over all, at intervals, there rang out the shout of ecstasy, the sob, and the groan." Various automatisms appeared among the crowds and, their natural cause not being understood, they were ascribed to supernatural influence. The "falling" exercise, in which persons seemed to be struck down, the "jerks," the "barking" exercise, the "holy laugh," and other phenomena of the kind were common and contagious. Hallucinations, trances, speaking with tongues, and many other extravagances occurred. Under such circumstances it is obvious that the conversions are in large part due to suggestion and hypnotism. The preacher insists on concentration of attention and quiet, his vocabulary is replete with vivid imagery, and the sign of acceptance is

simply that of raising the hand or rising or going forward. Effective use is made of stirring music at the psychological moment when the suggestion is at its height and a decisive sign is sought.

The better understanding of these occurrences has been accompanied with a discriminating estimate of the effects in the lives of many who were subject to them. The recognition of the legitimate place of emotion and passion in relation to reflection and practical conduct gains from such a study. Davenport holds that the passional in religion will never be overthrown. "Even the primitive and instinctive emotions themselves do not perish; they are only rationalized and socialized." An important tendency in evangelism in America is seen in the changes which have appeared in the sermons since the days of Jonathan Edwards. He appealed to the motive of fear and swept his hearers with storms of emotion. Charles G. Finney rejected the extreme Calvinism of Edwards, with its doctrine of total depravity, and vehemently championed the free moral agency of man, but he still employed the emotion of fear in the most dramatic manner.

It was Dwight L. Moody who emancipated popular revivalism from irrational fear. He magnified the love and self-sacrifice of the gospel. In more recent revivals there is a tendency to represent religion as the champion of moral reforms in which the converts are to be enlisted.

One general criticism of this book should be made from the standpoint of the latest works on the primitive mind. A book like Boas' *The Mind of Primitive Man* will be of great service to those interested in the subject. Boas would say that primitive man does not lack mental control and inhibition, but that he exhibits these in different ways than does civilized man. In the chase and in battle he displays persistence, fortitude, and amazing patience and endurance. He is not so much lacking in mentality as he is in the interests, organization, and technique of modern man.

Miss Burr's *Religious Confessions and Confessants* is another important new addition to this literature. Her book is a survey of the confessional writings of various religions in different ages and faiths. The selection of material was determined by the presence of a definite religious emotion and by the fact that it was first-hand. In other words, the documents chosen were *religious* and they were *personal*. There are included, besides formal autobiography, records from journals, day books, diaries, intimate letters, as well as extracts from philosophical disquisitions and theological apologia. The study is inductive, using what is known in law as the case system. The author points out that in a study of this kind it is difficult yet necessary to maintain an impartial and thoroughly scientific attitude, and the reader will feel that she has succeeded in doing this.

The general plan of the book is to discuss the impulse toward confession, and the faculty of introspection; to analyze the records and relate them to the groups and sects from which they have emanated; and finally to classify the data under separate heads to show the progress of religious experience.

The impulse to confession is found to be a common trait of human nature. It is just the familiar phenomenon in its simplest terms which characterizes man as a member of society. The individual lives in a warm and intimate social medium and tends to communicate his inmost thoughts to those who are nearest him. The depth and vitality of religious companionship both with the spiritual powers

above and with one's fellow-man may be seen in this very fact of constant conversation with them in the way of prayer and ordinary discourse. St. Augustine gave currency to the confessional within the church by his own voluminous and frank recitals of his varied experiences. Indeed, so full and unrestrained an unveiling of his inner life has at times presented a difficulty to the church. Some have claimed that his "confessions" are not really autobiographical and were never intended by the author to be so understood. Modern psycho-analysis of the Freudian type has shown that such confessions are sources of great relief to the subject and are often the beginning of health and happiness. It does not mean among religious people that the converted man who confesses his sins has led a worse life than his neighbors, but only that he is now able to recognize it as evil. They of course tend to be more in favor in periods when religion is regarded as most individualistic.

The habit of introspection in religion was largely due to the influence of Christianity, which gave a new value to the individual and to his inner states and disposition. Such attitudes scarcely appear in primitive religions and are strikingly absent from Greek life. No doubt at certain periods in the history of Christianity they have become morbid and repulsive, but the advantages of normal and recurrent self-examination are now recognized as necessary phases of self-criticism and moral growth. It is only with the development of a more adequate psychology and technique for practice and guidance that introspection obtains its proper checks and tests. The author has utilized for her purpose an imposing array of great names in literature and philosophy. Al-Ghazzali, Descartes, Kant, Nietzsche, Dante, Montaigne, Rousseau, Byron, Emerson, Amiel, Oscar Wilde, and many others of their times and spiritual kinship are discussed.

An important feature of this investigation is that it recognizes the social setting and relation of the confessants and indicates the group likenesses between them. The particular groups whose members are especially studied are the Gottesfreunde, in fourteenth-century Germany; the English Quakers around George Fox; the English Methodists around John Wesley; the Scottish seventeenth-century Pietists; the French Port-Royalists, and the American Mormons. Group contagion is noted in all of these, in spite of loud protests of entire originality. Mysticism is a fertile field for these introspective studies, and nowhere is the sense of independence more vigorously asserted, though an objective inquiry shows here also a very evident influence of social contagion and of the imitation of striking personalities.

This elaborate and erudite work, extending through five hundred closely printed pages, will be regarded by many as having one of its greatest values as a guide to the original sources of confessional literature. It is a difficult question to know how to balance the presentation of documents and their interpretation. In this case the quotations are relatively short and scrappy. In this respect the book is in contrast to that of James which we have reviewed. He was lavish in the reproduction of experiences and it added an intense, living quality to his work. In Miss Burr's book one often wishes for a larger sample of the case in immediate relation to the discussion.

The total impression which the author gains from her studies with reference to the fortunes of religion during its history is that it is becoming more rational

and practical. What she seems to mean by the "religious instinct," although that term has largely disappeared from scientific use, is the selective activity by which we choose higher and higher symbols to supersede those which we have discarded. "The work of the courageous rationalist—who today is the only idealist—is but begun." In the future "religious doctrine will not be founded on horror, but on beauty; not on fear, but on security; not on wild revelations to a few, but on hope and constructive ethics to the many. It will teach its followers, through science, how better to fight the battle with their brute selves."

THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

BY J. M. POWIS SMITH

AN OUTLINE BIBLE-STUDY COURSE OF THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF SACRED LITERATURE

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STUDY II

THE SERVANT OF JEHOVAH

In our last study we recalled that in 586 B.C. the Hebrew nation went into exile in Babylonia, following the capture and destruction of the city of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (II Kings 24:18—25:21).

The prophet to whom we owe the idea of the "Servant of Jehovah" was living in Babylonia after many years of exile and preaching therefore to a people who were profoundly discouraged. His utterances are found in Isa., chaps. 40–55, and are among the most eloquent of the Old Testament.¹ Isa. 44:28—45:1 will tell you that Cyrus, the Medean conqueror of Babylon in 538 B.C., was in the mind of the writer, and this fact fixes the date of the book. The Jews in Babylonia were looking forward at this time to the coming of another conqueror, and had little knowledge of what their fate might be. The state of mind of the people to whom the prophet preached may be easily imagined.

First day.—§ 18. Read Isa. 41:1–4, 8–16 and note how the prophet argues with his hearers, and bids them not to be downcast and hopeless. He sees a

¹ The earlier chapters of this book are the speeches of a prophet living in Jerusalem more than one hundred years before its fall.